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SUBJECT: CONGRESSMAN ROHRBACHER'S MEETINGS IN SEOUL

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, met separately with ROK Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan and members of the National Assembly on March 25 to advocate several proposed initiatives. Foremost on the list was the Congressman's proposal that the ROK send 20,000 to 30,000 paid civilian "constables" to serve in police functions in Iraq. This volunteer constabulary force would provide security in Iraq while also paving the way for better business relations between Korea and Iraq, especially in the much needed area of energy, and would signal to the U.S. and the world Korea's strong commitment to the Alliance and its willingness to assume greater international responsibility. The Congressman also proposed that Korea should explore adoption of a new type of nuclear reactor being developed in Japan. Compared to reactors currently in use, Rohrabacher explained, Japan's high-temperature gas cooled reactor presented a safer and cleaner alternative. Noting the fragile state of the DPRK regime and comparing it to the final years of the Soviet Union, only worse, the Congressman also encouraged the Foreign Minister to look for opportunities to achieve unification between the North and South during President Lee's tenure in office. End Summary.

KOREAN CONSTABLES IN IRAQ

¶2. (SBU) In all his meetings, Congressman Rohrabacher outlined a plan for the ROK to authorize establishment of a private organization of paid "constables" who would provide security for oil pipelines, prisons, and ports in Iraq. The force would ideally consist of 20,000 to 30,000 Koreans with prior military training who would voluntarily sign up to work in Iraq, with the blessing of the ROKG. Much like the USG's use of government contract personnel such as Blackwater or Triple Canopy, the ROK could form a private company to organize, recruit, and train a Korean constable force. Doing so would serve several purposes for Korea. It would give Korea a chance to show its support for the U.S. and Iraq, and its commitment to assume greater international responsibility. At the same time, it would also provide employment for many of Korea's younger generation who were struggling to find employment following graduation from college or after completion of their mandatory military service. Depending on arrangements with the Government of Iraq, in exchange for the police force Korea could secure oil rights while also opening the door for Korean businesses to start new ventures in Iraq. The Congressman said that this idea was not yet ready for public discussion but he hoped it might be discussed in the lead-up to the April 2008 Presidential Summit. Foreign Minister Yu responded that he would need some time to explore the idea before he could offer a detailed response.

REP. PARK JIN'S VIEW

13. (SBU) In a separate meeting, Representative Park Jin, a member of the Unification, Foreign Affairs and Trade Committee, responded that while he recognized that dispatching a large number of well-trained Korean police would provide much needed security in Iraq, ongoing public concerns over the safety of Korean citizens in areas of conflict would likely pose a problem. The ROK needed to find a means to provide security for its own citizens if they were sent into conflict zones. One means which the ROKG was exploring was to increase its participation in peace-keeping operations (PKO). The ROK recognized the importance of playing a larger role in global security but a lack of public support was likely to remain a problem. According to Park, many in the Korean public would view the Congressman's proposal as the ROK sending "mercenaries" on behalf of the U.S. Congressman Rohrabacher acknowledged that gaining public support would be a challenge but said that often good proposals, especially bold ones, were divisive at first. Even though the term "mercenary" had a negative connotation, the principle was sound; it really meant trained professionals who had military experience and adequate weapons and tactical equipment. Given Korea's supply of well-trained and capable military reservists, the ROK could develop the idea of a constable force as a new export that would be in demand throughout the world.

LESS OPTIMISM FROM REP. HWANG

14. (SBU) In a subsequent meeting, Representative Hwang Jin-ha, a member of the National Assembly's National Defense Committee, said three things needed to happen before the ROK could seriously consider the idea of Korean constables for Iraq. First, President Lee Myung-bak needed time to establish his presidency and finalize his cabinet and other key appointments. Second, President Lee needed his Grand National Party (GNP) to win a majority of seats in the April 9 National Assembly elections to give the President the necessary power to implement his decisions. Third, President Lee needed to build support for his presidency among the public before he could present a proposal such as sending civilians to Iraq. The ROK would therefore have to approach this idea carefully, Hwang said. Congressman Rohrabacher recalled that when President Bush first announced the troop surge in Iraq, it was met with much skepticism and opposition. Against the advice of his staff, the Congressman said that he had supported the President's initiative, which had worked. "As elected officials, it is our job to lead the people, even if it sometimes makes them angry," the Congressman concluded.

ALTERNATIVE NUCLEAR POWER

15. (SBU) The Congressman also previewed a new type of nuclear reactor being developed in Japan. Noting that Korea relies entirely on imports for its energy, the Congressman proposed that Korea should investigate a new form of nuclear power that is safer and cleaner than the technology now used in the ROK. Working with Russian scientists, General Atomics, a U.S. company, had produced a model of a high-temperature gas cooled reactor in Japan. This new reactor posed no risk of a radioactive gas release or meltdown. It did not produce plutonium waste but could consume waste from other reactors, hence eliminating the possibility of fuel for nuclear weapons. The Congressman suggested that Korea could build the first working prototype of this reactor, which would also give Korea the chance to work more closely with the Japanese and Russians. In addition, it would be a boon for the ROK as it fulfilled President Lee's ambition to secure more energy resources. FM Yu noted that as the price of oil continued to rise, the ROK increasingly looked for alternate energy sources and new technology to meet its demands. Representative Park Jin offered to pass this information on to the National Assembly's Science and Technology Committee for further review.

UNIFICATION OF KOREA

16. (SBU) The Congressman stressed in all his meetings that under the new Korean President, our two countries would enjoy even closer ties

than in the past. We could also work more closely together to support human rights in North Korea. Rather than accommodating the North as we had done for the past ten years, we could make great strides in supporting democracy in the North. Just as the U.S. had been able to make deals with those in power in the Soviet Union to bring down the Iron Curtain, so too in North Korea we could find those in positions of power with whom we could secure a deal. China would likely welcome a peacefully united Korea, devoid of U.S. forces and nuclear weapons. FM Yu replied that he had just returned from a trip to China where Chinese officials expressed frustration with North Korean behavior, noting there was a lack of trust between China and North Korea. Yu said that China was becoming more aware of its role as a "responsible stakeholder" in the region and was therefore acting more constructively in its relations with the South. In an effort to strengthen regional ties, Yu said that he hoped to restart the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) with Japan and the U.S. The TCOG could play a key role, Yu added, especially in handling North Korean refugees.

17. (U) This cable was cleared by the Congressman's staff.